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WVC close to getting its hub

By Rosemary Winters

WEST VALLEY CITY - Utah's second-largest city is one step closer to having its own light rail line and bustling transit hub, like Salt Lake City.

Tuesday, the City Council approved an interlocal agreement with the Utah Transit Authority to build the West Valley City TRAX spur and a hub that will link trains with Bus Rapid Transit - the first line is set to run along 3500 South next year - and regular bus service.

The contract formalizes plans that already were under way and provides direction for the much anticipated project.

"This has been years in the making," said City Councilman Mike Winder. "Bring the trains on out!"

A sales tax hike approved by Salt Lake County voters last year will fund the light rail line, which is expected to be completed in mid-2011. UTA plans to start construction next year.

But UTA and West Valley City are banking on future federal grants to cover the cost of the \$9.5 million hub, which will be located behind City Hall. The city has agreed to provide up to \$2 million in matching funds, as needed.

"We're feeling positive that we will find a way to do this," said John Janson, West Valley City's assistant community and economic development director. That could require "more aggressive lobbying" of Congress, which allocates the transportation funds, he noted.

Already, some federal grants, adding up to around \$1 million, have been used to buy some land for the project and demolish a former LDS Church chapel.

Work on the hub's parking lot began this week. The city and UTA promise, in the agreement, to share that expense if they don't secure federal funds to cover it. They hope to complete the hub, which includes a public plaza and a bus loop, before the 5-mile TRAX line is complete.

For West Valley City, the hub is more than a bus stop, it's a key piece of the city's dreams for a vibrant city center, which also hinge on a planned revamp of the Valley Fair

Mall.

The vision is to bump the area around City Hall, located at 3600 S. Constitution Blvd. (2700 West), from the "suburban scale" to a "mid-rise urban scale," Janson said.

There's some discussion, Janson added, of whether the half-acre-sized hub plaza should be molded into an active community gathering spot by scheduling concerts, farmers markets and artist shows. Or it could be left as a more casual "leisure" area, he said.

UTA has agreed to provide up to \$100,000 for public art at the four West Valley City TRAX stops, including the hub, if the city provides matching dollars.